Claims

[c1] 1. Apparatus having a first end and a second end,
the first end comprising a spatulate member having a length along a first axis;
the second end comprising a guide shaped to receive a cylindrical axle for rotation on a second axis, the guide shaped to constrain the first axis in fixed position relative to the second axis, the first and second axes each lying within a plane;
the spatulate member extending in a first direction and a second direction from the first axis, the first direction and second direction being on opposite sides of the plane.

[c2] 2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the first and second axes are more than one-quarter inch apart and less then an inch apart.

[c3] 3. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the length of the spatulate member is greater than one inch and less then seven inches.

[c4] 4. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the guide comprises two members each extending toward the second axis from the first axis, each of the two members having a hole shaped to receive the cylindrical axle.

[c5] 5. The apparatus of claim 1, further characterized in that the extensions in the first and second directions define a width, the width being less than one-third of the length.

[c6] 6. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the spatulate member is symmetric relative to the first axis.

[c7] 7. The apparatus of claim 1 further characterized as being sterile.

[c8] 8. The apparatus of claim 7 further comprising a wrapper surrounding the first and second ends.

[c9] 9. The apparatus of claim 1 further characterized as made of plastic.

[c10] 10. The apparatus of claim 1 further characterized as made of metal.

[c11] 11. A system comprising a helical suture instrument and apparatus having a first end and a second end,

the first end comprising a spatulate member having a first length along a first axis;

the helical suture instrument having a cylindrical axle defining a second axis and a helical portion, the helical portion having a helical outer diameter and having a second axial length along the second axis,

the second end of the apparatus comprising a guide shaped to receive the cylindrical axle for rotation on the second axis, the guide shaped to constrain the first axis in fixed position relative to the second axis, the first and second axes each lying within a plane;

the spatulate member extending in a first direction and a second direction from the first axis, the first direction and second direction being on opposite sides of the plane;

wherein the first and second axes are farther apart than the helical outer diameter, whereby there is space between the helical portion and the apparatus;

wherein the first length is at least five-sixths of the second length.

[c12] The system of claim 11 wherein the first length is greater than the second length.

[c13] 13. The system of claim 11wherein the guide comprises two members each extending toward the second axis from the first axis, each of the two members having a hole shaped to receive the cylindrical axle.

[c14] 14. The system of claim 11, further characterized in that the extensions in the first and second directions define a width, the width being less than one-third of the first length.

[c15] 15. The system of claim 11 wherein the spatulate member is symmetric relative to the first axis.

[c16]

16. A suturing method performed with a system comprising a helical suture instrument and apparatus having a first end and a second end, the first end comprising a spatulate member having a first length along a first axis; the

helical suture instrument having a cylindrical axle defining a second axis and a helical portion, the helical portion having a helical outer diameter and having a second axial length along the second axis, the second end of the apparatus comprising a guide shaped to receive the cylindrical axle for rotation on the second axis, the cylindrical axle located within the guide, the guide shaped to constrain the first axis in fixed position relative to the second axis, the first and second axes each lying within a plane; the spatulate member extending in a first direction and a second direction from the first axis, the first direction and second direction being on opposite sides of the plane; wherein the first and second axes are farther apart than the helical outer diameter, whereby there is space between the helical portion and the apparatus; wherein the first length is at least five-sixths of the second length; the method performed with respect to a first tissue to be sutured between first and second edges, and a second tissue, the method comprising the steps of:

placing the spatulate member between the first and second tissues;

rotating the helical suture instrument in a first direction to pierce alternately the first and second edges of the first tissue;

rotating the helical suture instrument in a second direction to withdraw the helical suture instrument from the first tissue; and

withdrawing the spatulate member from between the first and second tissues as the helical suture instrument is rotated in the second direction.